

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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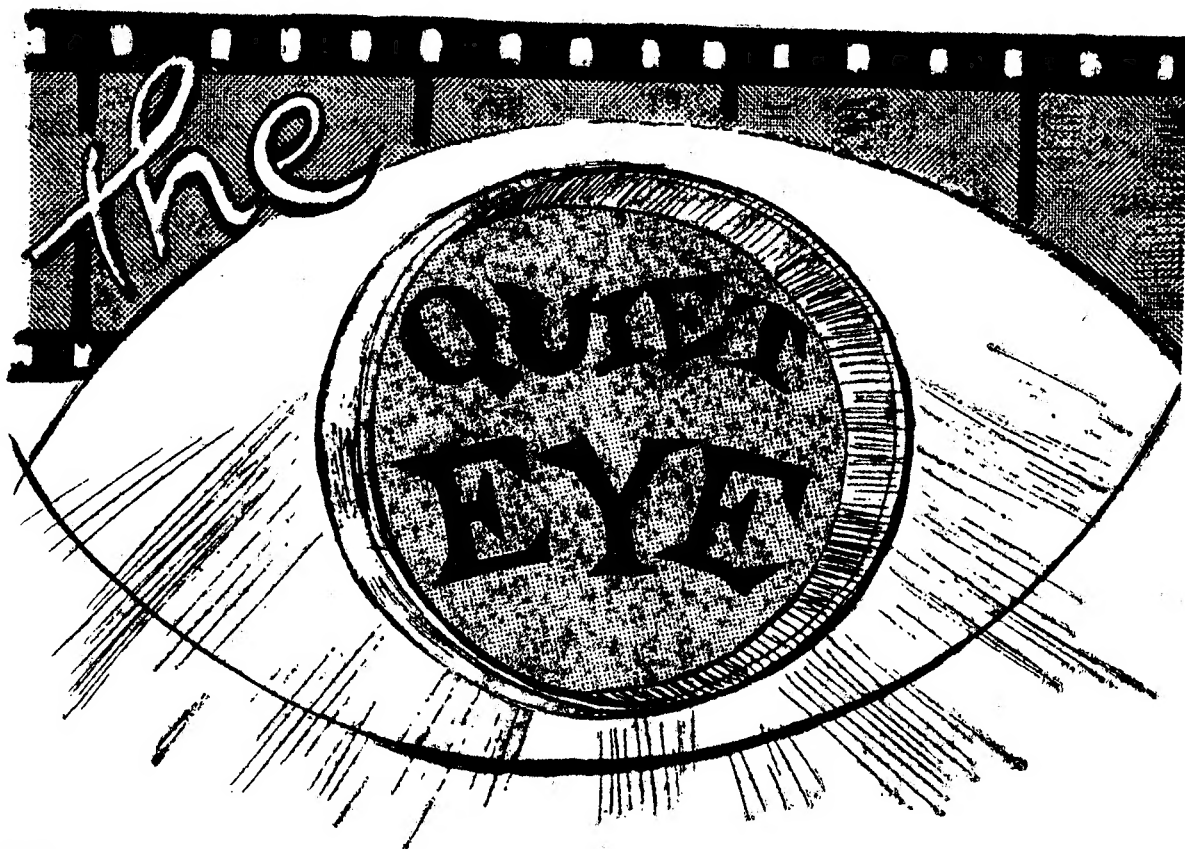
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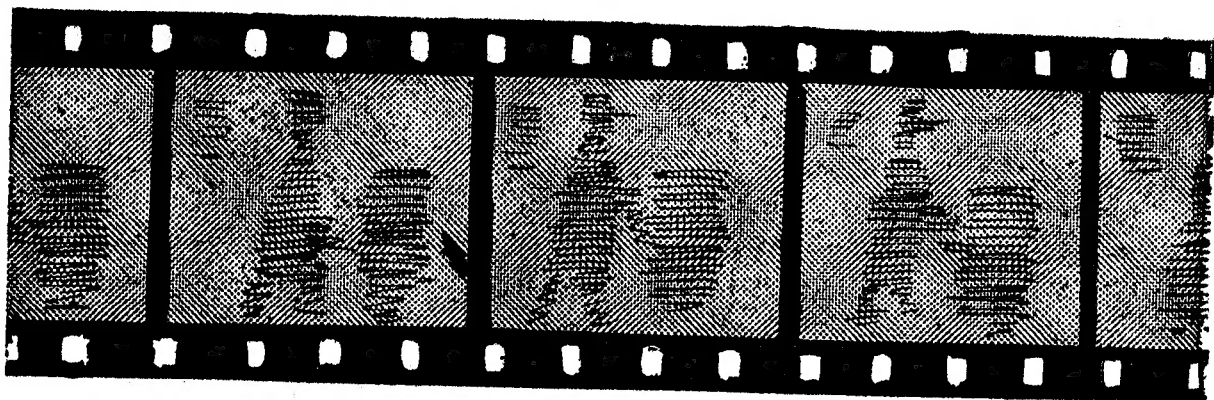
WHEN I got there, the first thing Miss Duncan said to me was, "Lieutenant, we have motion pictures of the robbery *actually* taking place."

While one of the state troopers used a hacksaw on the chain binding her wrist to the water cooler stand, I got her description of the two men. I relayed that to headquarters on my car radio, but there wasn't too much to work on. Both men had worn full-face masks.

Miss Duncan was free and rubbing her wrist when I returned to the bank building. She pointed to a spot under the teller's grill. "That first button on the floor. I stepped on it just as soon as I saw they were wearing masks and one of them pointed a gun at me." Now she indicated a small rectangular opening on the rear wall near the ceiling. "When I stepped on the button, the camera up there *automatically* began taking motion pictures

The presence of an all-seeing eye has terrified the guilty and comforted the innocent, all through the annals of crime. We can thank progress and ingenuity and Monsieur Daguerre for the recorded evidence of this all-seeing eye.





of everything happening out here."

I noticed that there were two buttons on the floor under the counter. "What's the other one for?"

"That's the alarm."

"Why didn't you step on that one too?"

Miss Duncan was in her late twenties. She flushed slightly, "But that makes so much noise. A bell ringing, you know. And . . . well, I thought that the man might get nervous or excited and shoot me."

A hundred or more of the townspeople were crowding outside trying to see what was going on in here. It had snowed early in the morning, but the temperature had risen and now the streets and sidewalks were dirty slush.

The Wallisfield Branch Bank was a small, one-storied building without a vestibule. The entrance doors led directly into a fairly large room cut into two long halves by the partly grilled counter. To the rear, and behind the counter, was the manager's glass-enclosed office.

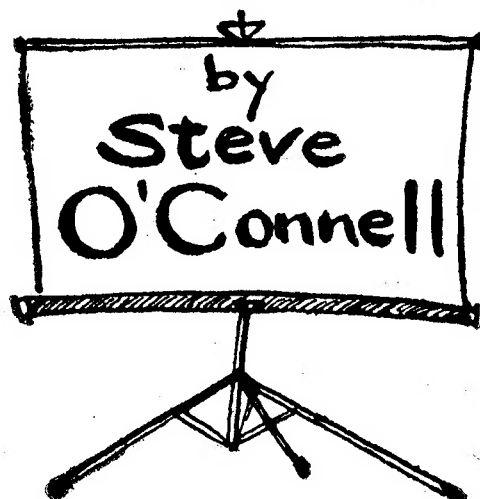
"I'd better phone Mr. Bramer

immediately," Miss Duncan said. "Bramer?"

"The manager. He's at a meeting of the board of the R.E.A. Our power plant is trying to negotiate an improvement loan and Mr. Bramer wanted to see exactly what the board plans to do with the money."

I let her make the call and when she hung up, I said, "Were you the only employee in the bank when the robbery occurred?"

Miss Duncan smiled. "Besides Mr. Bramer, I *am* the only employee. I'm the teller, the clerk, the typist, and what-have-you. This is just a branch bank and a small one—the main office is in Newford—



and we really don't need more than the two of us."

"Were there any patrons in the bank?"

"No. I was the only one here, Lieutenant. The bank opens at nine, and we're usually pretty busy until ten. But from then until perhaps eleven, we have a slack period. Sometimes no one comes in at all."

I got her a paper cup of water and had her start her story from the beginning.

"These two men came into the bank at about ten-thirty. One of them stayed at the front window, watching the street, but the other pulled a gun out of his pocket and came toward me. That's when I stepped on the button." She sipped the water. "He just pulled up the counter top and walked right in behind here. He ordered me to open the vault."

"It was locked?"

"No. The door was just closed. We open the vault at nine and it stays open until we close the bank at three."

"And so you opened the vault?"

"Yes. All I had to do was turn the handle. There was really nothing else I could do, was there?"

"No. You did the right thing."

"This man with the gun had a zipper bag and he just scooped up all the paper money in the vault.

After that he took that chain and the padlock out of his pocket. He chained my wrist to the water cooler stand and blindfolded me. The water cooler is bolted to the floor and I couldn't even reach the phone when they were gone. I just had to wait until somebody came in."

"Did you try to attract attention? Scream?"

"He told me not to make a sound or try to take off the blindfold. He said if I did he'd come back and shoot me. And so I didn't do anything but stand there for about five minutes. Finally, I got up enough nerve to move the blindfold just a little and when I saw that they were *really* gone, I decided to scream. But just then Martin Sawyer came in to cash a check. He runs the supermarket down the street."

I asked for the description of the two men again.

"They were both about five ten, I'd say, though I'm not too good a judge of height. They wore brown hats, brown topcoats, and gloves. And, of course, those Halloween masks. Both were the same. Satan."

I looked at the short length of chain which had bound Miss Duncan to the water cooler. "Did one, or both of the gunmen, rattle?"

She blinked. "Rattle?"

I smiled. "I mean did you hap-

pen to notice, or hear the sounds of other pieces of chain they might have carried in their pockets?"

She was perplexed and so I explained. "The hold-up men faced the possibility of finding not only you here, Miss Duncan, but also Mr. Bramer, and possibly a half a dozen other patrons. Did they expect to chain all of them? That seems a little ridiculous, though we can't discount that. But if they had just *one* length of chain and just *one* padlock, they must have anticipated that you would very likely be the only person in the building. They might *even* have *known* that Mr. Bramer wouldn't be here."

"I still don't see . . ."

"It would establish the fact that they were not simply strangers who happened to be lucky in the time they chose to rob the bank."

She shook her head. "I'm sorry, Lieutenant, but I'm afraid I was too nervous and frightened to notice."

"How much money did they get?"

She gave it thought. "Well, this is Friday. We always get an extra shipment of cash from the main bank on Thursday afternoons. That's to cover the paychecks people around here cash over the week end. And then there's our normal cash reserve." She did a sum in her

head. "I couldn't tell you exactly, Lieutenant, but I'd say it was in the neighborhood of twenty-five thousand dollars."

"You don't know whether they got into a car or not?"

"No. I didn't dare move the blindfold for awhile."

I noticed one of the troopers outside let a man go past him to the front door.

"That's Mr. Bramer," Miss Duncan said.

Bramer was in his middle forties and graying at the temples. He wiped his feet on the mat as he stepped inside, but he needn't have bothered. The black marble floor was already wet and dirty.

He nodded to me and then turned to Miss Duncan. "You're *positive* you turned on the camera, Ellen?"

"Yes, Mr. Bramer. The very first thing."

I glanced back at the opening for the camera lens. "Let's get the film."

Bramer and I went into a small utility room at the rear of the building. He stepped up to the wooden platform on which the camera was mounted and removed the film. "It's wide angle and the film runs for ten minutes."

"Isn't it unusual for a bank of this size to have one of these cameras?"

"Not necessarily. Being small, we're more prey to hold-ups than the larger banks. As a matter of fact we had a hold-up similar to this one three and a half years ago. After that experience the main office felt that it might be wise to install one here."

"How many people besides you and Miss Duncan know that you have a camera up here?"

"Well . . . the people in the main office at Newford and . . ." He hesitated.

I smiled faintly. "And your wife? And her best friend? And the man who installed it?"

He seemed embarrassed. "Yes."

"In other words, just about everybody in town knew about it?"

He smiled ruefully. "I suppose so. It's hard to keep a secret in a small town and we've had the camera for more than three years." He shrugged helplessly. "It got around. I'm sorry to say."

"No need to be sorry. It might actually be a help to us."

He didn't understand that.

"Because it more or less eliminates any local suspects. It's hardly likely that anybody who knew about the camera would allow himself to be photographed while he was robbing the bank. Even if he was wearing a mask."

I assigned men to canvas the neighborhood for possible wit-

nesses or information. I debated sending a trooper to the state laboratory with the film and then decided to go myself. I was anxious to see the film just as soon as it was developed.

I had driven about three miles when a blue sedan roared past me. I was doing the legal limit and so I estimated that he must be doing at least eighty.

I wasn't in the Traffic Division any more and I had other things on my mind, but I *am* a cop and I can't let a thing like that go. I kicked the siren and took after him.

He kept speeding for another mile and then slowed down. I thought he was going to pull off onto the shoulder of the road and stop, but instead he swung into a secondary road. He picked up a little speed again, but not much. The muddy condition of the road made driving tricky. I gained on him and, finally, when we got to a clump of woods in a valley he slowed the car again and this time he stopped.

I pulled up behind him and then hesitated.

There was something wrong about this. I had been driving a State patrol car, plainly marked, and even the most chronic speeder never passes a patrol car when he's breaking the limit. He knows he's inviting a sure ticket.

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And there was another thing. When they stop and you pull up behind them, they always turn for at least look at you. They want to see how big you are. But this one didn't. He stared straight ahead up at his rear view mirror and I could almost feel the tenseness in his waiting.

I got out and when I reached the blind spot at the left rear of his car, I slipped my .38 out of the holster and snapped off the safety.

I stopped when I got just behind his left shoulder.

When he knew that I wasn't going to take another step forward, he acted. His right hand flashed up with an automatic, but he had to swing around to use it and that gave me a fraction of a second over him.

My slug shoved him back to the far side of the car and his shot spidered the window wing ahead of me. I tightened for a second shot, but I didn't have to use it. The gun wasn't in his hand any more and the surprise of death froze in his face.

I studied the dead face and had to write him off as a stranger. I went back to my car and radioed State Police headquarters.

Sergeant Spencer, who arrived with one of the first patrol cars, was able to provide an identification. "His name is Jim Tracy and

he lived in Wallisfield. I picked him up on suspicion in a filling station hold-up about a year ago, but I couldn't make anything stick."

Spencer was a narrow-eyed man who had the reputation of never smiling. He watched the body being put into the basket. "The kid must have been drunk or crazy to try something like that just to get out of a speeding ticket."

I shook my head. "I don't think it's as simple as that. He deliberately led me to this spot and I have the feeling that it was just to kill me."

"Why would he do that?"

"I'm on the Wallisfield holdup. The bank had one of those cameras in the back of the building and the whole operation was photographed. I was taking the film to the state lab to have it developed. It's my hunch that he wanted the film."

"How did he know there was a film?"

"Everybody in town knew about the camera. Tracy wasn't likely to be an exception."

Spencer thought about that. "And you figure that Tracy was one of the hold-up men?"

"I'm going to think about it that way for awhile. It might help."

"But that doesn't make sense. If Tracy knew about the camera, why would he let himself be photo-

graphed? The smart thing to do would have been to destroy the film before he ever left the bank."

"Maybe. But on the other hand, if they *let* themselves be photographed, we would most likely come to the conclusion that the job had to be done by people outside of Wallisfield—people who didn't know about the camera. Maybe they wanted us to think that way."

"But *now*. Tracy wanted that film enough to kill for it? Why?"

"I don't know. But it's my guess that he suddenly realized there was something on the film that could make trouble for him."

Spencer followed me to my car. "I'd like to go to the lab with you, Lieutenant. I'm anxious to see the film myself."

I found a farm driveway where I could turn the car around and headed back toward the highway.

Spencer lit a cigarette. "According to the radio descriptions, the two of them were wearing Halloween masks. I don't see how that film's going to help us much."

When I turned into the highway, Spencer thought of something else. "Granted that Tracy knew there was a film. But how did he know that you were the one who had it?"

"There were about a hundred people outside the bank building.

He was probably one of them and saw me take the film can when I left. So he followed me."

"How much money did they get?"

"About twenty-five thousand."

We got the film to the state laboratory in another fifteen minutes and after a rush job of developing, we used one of the laboratory projectors.

The film began abruptly at the point where one of the masked men reached for the countertop and lifted it up.

His partner remained at the front window, occasionally glancing back to see how he was doing.

Ellen Duncan backed away and the gunman said something to her. He waved the gun slightly toward the vault door.

She hesitated a moment and then went to it. She turned the handle down and the door swung open to reveal a shelved recess only two or three feet deep.

The gunman swiftly transferred the cash to his bag and when he finished he turned to Ellen Duncan and motioned toward the water cooler. She moved toward it reluctantly.

He brought a length of chain and a padlock out of his pocket. He wrapped the chain around her wrist several times and then around a leg of the water cooler.

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He snapped the padlock through the two end links and then tied a folded handkerchief over her eyes.

He glanced about for a few seconds, apparently to make certain he had forgotten nothing, and then picked up the bag. He spoke a few words to Ellen Duncan—probably the threat to shoot her if she made any outcry—and then went to the front doors. His companion joined him and they left the building and turned out of sight.

It was as simple as that and it took less than five minutes.

The film continued, but there was really nothing more. Ellen Duncan still stood immobile, chained to the water cooler, when the film ended.

I switched on the lights. "See anything that might help us?"

Spencer sighed. "No. Those loose topcoats and the masks make even a rough physical description almost impossible." He frowned angrily. "Why the devil would Tracy want to kill you for this?"

I rewound the film. "Let's run it again."

Except for the portion of the bank directly under the camera, the view of the interior was complete. It was even possible to see into the street hazily. The wall clock showed that the hold-up had begun at ten-thirty-one. Two narrow countertables for the patrons were fastened against the wall to

the left and they held the pens, ashtrays, and the neat stacks of deposit and withdrawal slips.

I ran the film three more times without seeing anything new and then switched on the lights again. "I'll have Bramer and Ellen Duncan take a look at it. They might see something we don't."

I made the phone call and when Spencer and I took the film to state police headquarters, Bramer and Ellen Duncan were waiting for us.

I took them up to our own small projection room and ran the film.

When it was over, I turned to Ellen Duncan. "Did you see anything at all that might help us?"

She shook her head slowly. "No, Lieutenant. I'm afraid not."

"Did you perhaps recognize the voice of the man who spoke to you?"

"No. It was just . . . well . . . an average voice. I don't think I ever heard it before."

"Mr. Bramer?" I said. "Did anything about them seem familiar? The way they walked?"

"No, Lieutenant. Nothing at all."

A police clerk opened the door to say there was a call for me.

I left the room to take the call, and when I got back, Spencer was running the film again.

I waited until he was through. "Our little film is getting famous," I said. "How would you people like to see it on television tonight? The ten o'clock news wants it."

Spencer seemed to be thinking of something else, but he did hear me. "Television?" He was still thoughtful. "That might not be a bad idea at that. A couple of million people watching the film ought to spot something."

I nodded. "That was my idea, too. The station's sending a man to pick up the film at eight."

Spencer took Bramer and Ellen Duncan back to the bank, but I had work to do downstairs.

Two of Tracy's closest friends had been picked up for questioning about the robbery. We kept them until about four-thirty and then I decided that we might just as well release them. They seemed to be in the clear, but I warned them to be available.

Back in my office, I went over the results of our routine checks. The team of auditors from the state had discovered nothing wrong with the bank's books—one of the first things we look for in cases like this—and Bramer himself was in fair financial condition. And he really had been at the R.E.A. meeting. Six people on the board were willing to swear that he had been with them from about nine-forty-

five until the time he had been notified about the bank holdup.

Bramer was a widower and had two adult children, but they were living downstate.

Ellen Duncan had been with the bank only three years and she lived with her father and mother.

There was some town talk that Bramer and Ellen Duncan might become more than merely manager and employee, but that kind of talk was inevitable whether it was true or not.

At five, I decided to call it a day.

When I got into my car, I noticed that the ashtray was full of butts. I took it out and carried it to a trash can.

When I got back to the car, I stared at the empty ashtray for half a minute. Then I closed my eyes and tried to remember.

Yes. I was sure of it.

But I went back into the building once more and looked at the film.

Then I drove to Wallisfield.

I had intended to drive directly to Bramer's home, but I saw that there were lights in the bank and both he and Ellen Duncan were working inside. An elderly cleaning woman was mopping the floor.

I parked my car and went to the door. It was locked, but I rapped on the glass door.

Bramer came to the door. He

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looked tired, but he managed a smile. "We close at four, Lieutenant, and are usually finished in here by five, but today's an obvious exception. So many reports to fill out and things to check and re-check. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I'll wait until you're through."

They went back to their work and I sat down to think things through once again.

At six the cleaning woman finished and left. A half an hour later, Bramer put the last books into the vault and closed it. He lit a cigarette. "And now, Lieutenant?"

I got to my feet. "Did you know that a man named Jim Tracy tried to kill me today?"

Ellen Duncan nodded. "Yes. It's all over town. And just because he didn't want a speeding ticket."

"No. It wasn't that. He wanted that film of the robbery."

Ellen Duncan's eyes appeared to widen. "But why?"

"He was one of the two men who robbed the bank."

Bramer rubbed his jaw. "I don't see why he would want that film. There was nothing that could have identified him."

"No. He was safe on that score. But there was something else he didn't want anyone to notice. Something he suddenly realized." I paused a moment. "Or more

likely he had it quickly pointed out to him by one of his accomplices."

Their eyes flickered, but they said nothing.

I smiled. "I looked at that film a dozen times and I saw nothing—until I stopped looking at the *people* and looked at the bank itself. It was supposed to be ten-thirty and you had been open for an hour and a half. And yet those deposit and withdrawal slips on the counters were in neat orderly piles. Not as though thirty or forty people had pawed their way through them. And the ashtrays were empty and clean."

Ellen Duncan's eyes were wary, but she managed to smile. "It was a slack period, Lieutenant. I straightened the counters myself and emptied and wiped the ashtrays."

"Possibly. But your camera had a view of the street, and yet during the course of the film not a single automobile or pedestrian passed."

"This is a small town and we're off the highway," Bramer said. "I don't think that's too unusual."

"Maybe you don't, but I do. Your town may be small and off the highway, but you *are* on the mainstreet. And one more thing. You were open an hour and a half before the robbery and you'd done the usual amount of business. It had

snowed and the snow had turned to slush. Thirty or forty people had tramped in here. And yet the film showed your floor was *clean*—not only clean, but completely dry.”

I shook my head slowly. “There was *no* robbery here this morning. You staged this whole thing on another day for the benefit of the camera and it’s my guess that you did it on a Sunday morning. At that time of the week, the main street is deserted or almost so. People are either at church or they’re home reading the Sunday papers. When you three performed your little act, it was probably Tracy who watched the street. If he saw anyone coming, you would all cut your performance short and hide. And later, Bramer, after you and Tracy left the building, there was still another danger period. The film still had five minutes to run. So you waited just out of sight. If someone had come along who might see Miss Duncan standing chained to the watercooler, I imagine you would rap on the window and she would crouch down where she couldn’t be seen from the street. And when the film was complete, you re-entered the building and released Miss Duncan. How many times did you have to go through your act and how many films did you use before you could finish without interruption?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Bramer said, but mildly and almost with amusement.

I went on. “After your performance, you simply left the film in the camera and waited for a Friday morning during which no one entered the bank between ten-thirty-one and ten-forty-one. You knew that was the time recorded on the film. Were you lucky the first Friday? Or did you have to wait two or three weeks for the right one to come along?”

I paused, but they said nothing.

“It’s my guess that every Friday morning, you, Bramer, would arrange to be out so that you could have a good alibi in case the question should arise in anyone’s mind. And you’d simply put all, or almost all, of the money in the vault into a bag and take it with you. If someone entered the bank during those crucial ten minutes when the robbery was supposed to have been taking place and filmed, Miss Duncan would phone you and you would bring the money back and wait for the next Friday.

“This morning when no one came into the bank between ten-thirty-one and ten-forty-one, Miss Duncan quickly chained herself to the water cooler. Your ‘robbery’ had taken place.”

Bramer smiled slightly. “Just suppose we took the money? What

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would you do if we offered you five thousand? A sergeant doesn't make much money, does he?"

"You're wasting your time. And I'm a lieutenant. Not a sergeant."

"Sorry," Bramer said equably. He sighed. "The lieutenant is making a mistake, Ellen, but I suppose there's nothing we can do about it now except go with him."

I drove them to headquarters and when we entered the building, I smelled smoke.

The Communications Sergeant turned from his board. "You just missed the excitement, Lieutenant. We had a little fire here. Nothing really serious. We put it out with extinguishers ourselves. But our projector got ruined."

I took the stairs up two at a time. A janitor was cleaning up and Sergeant Burrows watched him idly.

"How did it happen?" I asked.

Burrows shrugged. "Short-circuit in the machine, I guess. I wasn't there. Spencer was running the thing when the film suddenly flared up. He got a hand burned trying to put out the fire before he thought of getting the extinguisher."

I left the room and at the head

of the stairs I paused. Spencer had just come out of the room where we keep our first-aid equipment and his right hand was bandaged.

He looked across the room at Bramer and Miss Duncan, and then Spencer, the man who never smiled, showed even white teeth and he nodded almost imperceptibly.

I stared down at him and remembered Bramer's voice—a *sergeant* doesn't make much money, does he?

How much had Spencer sold out for, I wondered. Five thousand? Ten? Had he gone to them? Or had they come to him? And when did they make their arrangement? When I left them alone in our projection booth to answer the phone? Or later when Spencer drove them back to the bank?

But a crooked cop is a bad cop.

Did he think that I was going to let the television people pick up a prime piece of evidence like that film tonight without taking the precaution of having some copies made?

I had taken care of that in the afternoon.

I walked down the stairs. And this time I smiled.

"Just
What